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**RUSSIA**

# SUCCESS STORY

## Breaking Down Barriers Through Film

### Biennial film festival educates Russian public on disability issues



Photo: Perspektiva/Oxana Smidovich

Since its inception, the Breaking Down Barriers film festival has showcased more than 300 films from 30 countries to promote positive images of disabled people.

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There was no red carpet walk or bright lights of cameras, but a film festival in Russia had all the makings of an international culture event.

Directors and producers mingled with guests, celebrities signed autographs, and all eagerly awaited the final opening of the envelope. In what is becoming an institution for Russia’s disabled community, the country’s biennial disability film festival, Breaking Down Barriers, is educating Russians about disability issues and promoting positive images of disabled people.

Since the USAID-funded disability rights non-governmental organization Perspektiva began organizing the event in 2002, nearly 300 films from 30 countries have been screened. More than 4,000 people have attended festival activities in Moscow, and over 10,000 people attended festival screenings held in 20 regions of Russia and 7 other countries.

The films show real-life issues that disabled people confront every day, from their struggle to look and feel like everyone else to their acceptance of their bodies and minds.

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An estimated 15 million disabled people live in Russia, most of whom are still isolated from the mainstream community. Less than 10 percent of disabled people are employed, and less than half of disabled children and young adults receive an education. Physical barriers, as well as barriers of policy and attitude, continue to make this population virtually invisible.

With projects like the disability film festival and education programs for the disabled, Perspektiva promotes independence and an improved quality of life for disabled people in Russian communities. Since 1997, Perspektiva has worked with disability organizations in 16 regions across Russia.

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